



What Managers Say when They Talk about Gender and Careers

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What managers say when they talk about gender and careers

Like in many other European countries, the Danish financial sector is one in which the male occupation of managerial positions predominates, with women tending to occupy lower-ranking jobs. Social constructivist research has pointed out that this inequality is connected to the way men and women interact discursively (e.g. Sunderland 2004; Holmes 2006; Litosseliti 2006)

A recent study tested this claim against the analysis of metaphorical constructions of gender and career issues in a Danish bank, finding that when female and male managers are organised into single-sex groups, they tend to use metaphors that reflect dominant discourses on gender, resorting only briefly to constructing gendered subject positions (author 2009).

The paper takes its starting point in this study arguing that single-sex interview groups promote stereotypical gender constructions among female and male managers. However, if organised into e.g. mixed-sex groups, men and women are likely to construct their own and the opposite sex along lines that reflect more diversity and hence, tend to adopt metaphors that reflect a number of gendered subject positions.

To establish the validity of this claim, the paper will present the analysis of a number of mixed-sex focus group interviews conducted in a Danish bank in 2007. Taking a critical approach to metaphor, the discussion will include conceptual aspects of metaphor, but will also consider the influence of contextual aspects on the instantiation and meaning of gender metaphors (e.g. Cameron and Deignan 2006; Charteris-Black 2007).

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